

Town Meeting Coordinating Committee
Meeting Minutes July 24, 2008
First Floor Meeting Room, Town Hall

Call to Order: The meeting was called to order at 6:44 pm.

Present: Harry Brooks, Nonny Burack, Aaron Hayden, Peggy Roberts, Judy Simpson, Mary Streeter

Absent: Carol Gray

Minutes: June 26, 2008 – The minutes were not available.

Orientation

Nonny said reading Peggy's book of past minutes is very helpful. She noted the attendance, electronic voting, and the Select Board's timing of Town Meeting dates and deadlines have been on-going issues. Peggy said there is a turn over of 3 to 4 members every year.

Informing the Public about Town Meeting

Library Report Judy said several Town Meeting related materials are available now at the library – DVD's on budget, JCPC/CPA Overview, Bus Tours, a notebook with information about Town Meeting. She may take the DVD's to Special Collections where they can be watched. Mary suggested that everything be in one place or have a visible poster "Where to Learn about Town Meeting" listing where each item is located. Peggy commented that ACTV has been the most successful way to reach out to the public. Aaron commented that the newspapers are dying. We discussed the difficulty of getting the Amherst Bulletin to cover various events.

Scheduling TMCC Events

Peggy said our main job is to get ready for 2 Town Meetings per year. Harry said it all comes down to making sure the Select Board signs the warrant in a timely manner. Peggy and Harry said the Select Board members are frustrated that they themselves don't get information in a timely way. Mary said it might help them if we provide a schedule to them as we prepare for Precinct Meetings, Bus Tour, etc. Aaron said the law requires certain deadlines. Peggy said Town Meeting members need to understand the articles too. Aaron said we could say to the Select Board if you get the articles to us earlier, we could get the educational piece done. Peggy said Gail Weston has helped a lot with the schedule. Aaron said we need to have more forums. The Bus Trip can be the last one in a long string of events. We could host a School Committee night. Peggy said we couldn't do all of these every time there's a Town Meeting. Judy explained the Warrant Review night. The TMCC position is to not take sides. Peg said if people are going to come to this meeting they have to trust that they are not going to be slammed by one side or the other. Town Meeting begins Nov. 5, 2008 at 7:30 p.m. in the Auditorium at Amherst Regional Middle School, with possible additional dates on November 10, 12, 17, 20 & 24, and December 1 & 3, 2008. Nonny thought it is a bad idea to start Town Meeting on Nov. 5 because it's the day after Election Day. The Town Clerk and many Town Meeting members will be exhausted. Aaron suggested a note be sent or have an informal discussion with Gerry Weiss.

Mentoring Program – Judy said 1 new Town Meeting member asked for it and 5 Town Meeting members volunteered. She felt the Warrant Review was all she needed, Mary felt mentoring should continue if it's not too much trouble. We discussed calls to notify people that their term is up. It takes a few hours to get postcards out. A few years ago postcards were sent before the sign-up period ended by the Town Clerk.

Attendance – Do we need to call people who are not attending Town Meeting to ask if they're still interested in serving as a Town Meeting member? Mary said vacancies are posted on the Town website. Aaron suggested we could also say here's how you resign for those who do not wish to continue. Judy said the Town Clerk sends out notices of caucuses. Judy asked if we wanted to get started right away. Nonny said some people have never come – that's one issue. Peggy said we can put that on a list to look at. Judy said she will help on attendance things. Peggy said there are real reasons people can't attend.

New Ideas

Nonny suggested having a simply worded leaflet to hand out at the League of Women Voters Registration table on the Amherst Common. She said she would draw up a simply worded statement.

Precinct Meetings & Informational Forums

It's important that articles be fairly presented. Aaron said he had been to 8 Precinct Meetings, 1 as a Town Meeting member. Aaron said it's a really important thing. A lot of stuff happens there. He recommends that we set up 2 or 3 or 5 meetings for every Town Meeting member to go to. In individual precincts, information is spotty, especially in Precinct 1. Precinct Meetings are a great idea where they work. Mary thinks TMCC can informally sponsor them, maybe we could offer guidelines. We need to have ads in the paper. In the past when they were listed by TMCC in the paper, we had more members of the public come to meet Town Meeting members and ask questions or offer opinions. Precinct Meetings can be a good educational tool to learn about Town Meeting. Peggy said one was unsuccessful – one member went on advocating too long.

Aaron suggested two types of meetings, Precinct Meetings and Forums. Peggy said originally precinct meetings were to get Town Meeting members and public together – there was a social part. Aaron said in Precinct 8 folks learned about processes they were unfamiliar with. There might be 2 functions – what's going to happen and what you may be able to do. The orientation before the Warrant Review is a different thing. Aaron suggested having email interactive TV at the forums. Peggy said the evening scheduled does make a difference. We discussed the problem of having Warrant Reviews on a Wednesday since the Planning Board can't attend; we need facts on dates, legal deadlines, etc. Aaron said he'll go to the Planning Department and see if they intend to bring forward any zoning articles. The Planning Board has already notified the Select Board of articles they intend to bring forward. We need deadlines from Gail. We need to plan which activities we want to squeeze onto that schedule. Peggy said she will bring a copy of the latest draft of deadlines and dates for the preparation of the warrant to the next meeting.

Judy is concerned about time consumed related to seeing information on the screen at Town Meeting and asked if we could have 2 screens.

Next Meeting (rescheduled to August 27, 2008 at 6:30, place to be announced)

Peggy said we need information for us to work on the calendar for next time, review flyers on petition articles, send informational articles out through the listserv, etc. We send out a lot of information in the 2 mailings to Town Meeting members.

Adjournment

Meeting adjourned at 8:17. Nonny made motion, Judy seconded Vote 6-0.

Documents Distributed to New Members

Agenda 7/24/08

Guidelines for Petitioners of Warrant Articles September 2005

Article 1 TMCC Report to Town 4/28/08

Town Meeting Coordinating Committee Fiscal Year 2007

TMCC Report to Town Meeting Members on Suggestions to TMCC 4/08

Respectfully Submitted by Mary Streeter